

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 13, 2007

The Honorable John Dingell  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Barton  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2322A Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Health  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nathan Deal  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Health  
2322A Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20515

Dear Chairman Dingell, Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Barton and Ranking Member Deal:

As Members of the Maryland Congressional Delegation, we seek your support in establishing a comprehensive dental benefit within the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). We are moved to action by the tragic death of 12-year-old, Maryland resident Deamonte Driver. Deamonte suffered from a tooth infection that could have easily been treated if he had access to a dentist. Unfortunately, Deamonte was homeless and poor and his infection went untreated until it spread to his brain, ultimately killing him. We cannot afford to let another child suffer Deamonte's fate. We have a duty to ensure that all our children receive the medical attention they need, and dental care is no exception.


The Surgeon General reported in 2000 in *Oral Health in America* that a "silent epidemic of oral diseases is affecting our most vulnerable citizens—poor children, the elderly, and many members of racial and ethnic minority groups." Although we have advanced in reducing dental disease, the CDC reports that tooth decay in young children has actually increased over the past decade. Consider the following:


- Tooth decay remains the most prevalent chronic disease of U.S. children.
- Tooth decay is an infectious, transmissible and preventable chronic condition.
- Eighty percent of dental decay occurs in 25 percent of children, primarily low-income and minority children.
- More than one-in-four (28%) of preschool-aged children experience tooth decay.
- Less than one-third of poor children receive any dental care.
- Parents are three times more likely to report that their children's dental needs are unmet, when compared with general medical care needs.
- For every child without medical insurance there are nearly three without dental insurance.
- Children with health care coverage are more likely to access dental care compared to their uninsured counterparts.

Dental health is an integral part of overall health, and we must recognize this fact. That is why we encourage you to strengthen the dental financial safety-net by providing a stable and comprehensive dental benefit in the SCHIP reauthorization. We also request that the committee support ongoing outreach efforts to enroll all eligible children in SCHIP, enact mechanisms to ensure reliable data reporting on dental care in SCHIP, and consider developing a dental wrap-around benefit in SCHIP. These recommendations are supported by the nation's largest dental care organizations, and we believe that they represent necessary steps to ensuring the dental health, and indeed overall health, of our nation's most vulnerable children.

Thank you for your attention to this request. We anxiously await your response.

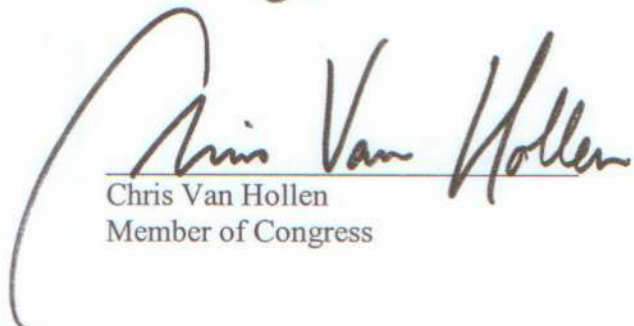
Sincerely,

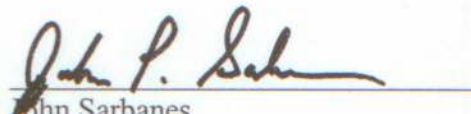
  
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